

Burney's Laugh

By STACY AUMONIER

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AFTER breakfast was a good time. Throughout the day there was no moment when his vitality rose to such heights as it did during the first puffs of that early cigar. He would stroll out then into the conservatory, and the bright color of the azaleas would produce in him a strange excitement. His senses would seem sharpened, and he would move quickly between the flowers, and would discuss minor details of their culture with Benyon, the gardener. Then he would stroll through the great spaces of his reception-rooms with his head bent forward. The huge Ming pot on its ebony stand would seem to him companionable and splendid, the Majolica plaques which he had bought at Padua would glow serenely. He would go up and feast his eyes on the Chinese lacquer cabinet on its finely wrought gilt base, and his lips would quiver with a tense enjoyment as he lingered by the little carved Japanese ivories in the recess. Above all, he liked to stand near the wall and gaze at the Vandyke above the fireplace. It looked well in the early morning light, dignified and impressive.

All these things were his. He had fought for them in the arena of the commercial world. He had bought them in the teeth of opposition. And they expressed *him*, his sense of taste, his courage, his power, his relentless tenacity, the qualities that had raised him above his fellows to the position he held. The contemplation of them produced in him a curious, vibrant exhilaration. Especially was this so in the morning when he rose from the breakfast-table and lighted his first cigar.

The great hall, too, satisfied his quivering senses. The walnut paneling shone serenely, and brass and pewter bore evidence that the silent staff whom his housekeeper controlled had done their work efficiently. It was early, barely nine

o'clock, but he knew that in the library Crevace and Dilgerson, his private secretaries, would be fidgeting with papers and expecting him. He would keep them waiting another ten minutes while he gratified this clamorous proprietary sense. He would linger in the drawing-room, with its long, gray panels and splendid damask hangings, and touch caressingly the little groups of statuary. The unpolished satinwood furniture appealed to some special esthetic appetite. It was an idea of his own. It seemed at once graceful and distinguished.

He seemed to have so little time during the rest of the day to feel these things. And if he had the time, the satisfaction did not seem the same, for this was the hour when he felt most virile.

In the library the exultation that he had derived from these esthetic pleasures would gradually diminish. It is true that Dilgerson had prepared the rough draft of his amendment to the new Peasant Allotment Bill, and it was an amendment that he was intensely interested in, for if it passed, it might lead to the overthrow of Chattisworth, and that would be a very desirable thing; but nevertheless his interests would flag.

He had a fleeting vision of a great triumph in the House, and himself the central figure. He settled down to discuss the details with Dilgerson. Dilgerson was a very remarkable person. He had a genius for putting his finger on the vital spot of a bill, and he had, moreover, an unfathomable memory. But gradually the discussion of involved financial details with Dilgerson would tire him. He would get restless and say:

"Yes, yes. All right, Dilgerson; put it your own way."

He turned aside to the table where Crevace, coughing nervously, was preparing some sixty-odd letters for him to sign. A

charming young man Crevace, with gentle manners and a great fund of concentration. He was the second son of Emma, Countess of Waddes. He had not the great ability of Dilgerson, but he was conscientious, untiring, and very useful.

He discussed the letters and a few social matters with Crevace, while Dilgerson prepared the despatch-case for the cabinet meeting at twelve o'clock.

At half-past eleven a maid entered and brought him a raw egg beaten up with a little neat brandy, in accordance with custom.

He told her that Hervieu, the chauffeur, need not come for him. He would walk over to Downing Street with Mr. Dilgerson. As a matter of fact, there was still one or two points upon which he was not quite clear about the rights of rural committees. Dilgerson had made a special study of these questions. It was a great temptation to rely more and more on Dilgerson.

He enjoyed a cabinet meeting. He felt more at home there than in the House. He liked the mixture of formality and urbanity with which the most important affairs were discussed. He liked to sit there and watch the faces of his fellow-ministers. They were clever, hard-headed men—men who, like himself, had climbed and climbed and climbed. They shared in common certain broad political principles, but he did not know what was at the back of any one of their minds. It amused him to listen to Brodray elaborating his theories about the Peasant Allotment Bill, and enunciating commendable altruistic principles. He knew Brodray well. He was a good fellow, but he did not really believe what he was saying. He had another ax to grind, and he was using the Peasant Allotment Bill as a medium. The divagations of "procedure" were absorbing. It was on the broad back of "procedure" that the interests of all were struggling to find a place. It was the old parliamentary hand who stood the best chance of finding a corner for his wares, the man who knew the ropes. He, too, had certain ambitions.

It seemed strange to look back on. He had been in political affairs longer than he dared contemplate—two distinct decades. He had seen much happen. He had seen youth and ambition ground to powder in the parliamentary machine. He had seen careers cut short by death or violent social scandal. Some men were very foolish—foolish and lacking in moral fiber. That must be it. Moral fiber, the strength not to overstep the bounds, to keep passion and prejudice in restraint, like hounds upon a leash, until their veins became dried and atrophied, and they lacked the desire to race before the wind.

He had done that. And now he sat there in the somber room, among the rustling papers, and the greatest minister of them all was speaking to him, asking his opinion, and listening attentively to his answers. He forced himself to a tense concentration on the issue. He spoke quietly, but well. He remembered all the points that the excellent Dilgerson had coached him in. He was aware of the room listening to him attentively. He knew they held the opinion that he was safe, that he would do the best thing in the interest of the party.

O'Bayne spoke after that, floridly, with wild dashes of Celtic fun; and they listened to him, and were amused, but not impressed. O'Bayne, too, had an ax to grind, but he showed his hand too consciously. He did not know the ropes.

As the meeting broke up, Brodray came up to him and said:

"Oh, by the way, you know I'm dining with you to-night. May I bring my young nephew with me? He's a sub, in town on a few days' leave."

Of course he smiled and said it would be delightful. What else was it possible to say?

As a matter of fact, he would rather not have had the young sub. He had arranged a small bachelors' dinner,—just eight of them,—and he flattered himself that he had arranged it rather skilfully. There was to be Brodray; and Nielson, the director of the biggest agricultural instrument works in the country; Lanyon,

the K. C.; Lord Bowel of the Board of Trade; Tippins, a big landowner from the North; Sir Andrew Griggs, the greatest living authority on the land laws (he had also written a book on "artificial manures"); and Sir Gregory Caste, director of the Museum of Applied Arts.

The latter he felt would perhaps be a little out of it with the rest, but he would help to emphasize his own aspect of social life, its irreproachable taste, and patronage of the arts. It would be a very eclectic dinner-party, and one in which the fusion of the agricultural interests might tend to produce certain opinions and information of use in conducting the Peasant Allotment Bill, and a red-faced young sub dumped into the middle of it would be neither appropriate nor desirable. There was, however, nothing to be done. He and Brodray had always been great friends; that is to say, they had always worked hand in hand.

He rested in the afternoon, for, as the years advanced, he found this more and more essential. There were the strictest instructions left that in no circumstances was he to be disturbed till half-past four. In the meanwhile the egregious Dilgerson would cope with his affairs.

At half-past four he rose, bathed his face, and, after drinking a cup of tea, rejoined his secretaries in the library. In his absence many matters had developed. There was a further accumulation of correspondence, and a neat type-written list of telephone-messages and applications for appointments. There was no flurry about Dilgerson; everything was in order, and the papers arranged with methodical precision.

He lighted his second cigar of the day and sat down. The graceful head of Crevace was inclined over the papers, and the suave voice of Dilgerson was saying:

"I see, sir, that Chattisworth has been speaking up in Gaysfield. Our agent has written; he thinks it might be advisable for you to go up north and explain to your constituents our attitude toward the bill. They must not be—er—neglected for long in these restless times."

Yes, there was something satisfying in this. The sense of power, or, rather, the sense of being within the power focus, the person who understood, who knew what power meant, and yet was great enough to live outside it. Strange why to-day he should be so introspective, why things should appear so abstract! He had a curious feeling as though everything were slipping away, or as though he were seeing himself and his setting from a distance.

He gazed at Dilgerson, with his square chin and his neat mustache, deftly stowing papers into a file while he spoke. He momentarily envied Dilgerson, with his singular grip on life. He was so intense, so sure.

"Yes, yes," he said after a time, "we'd better go up there, Dilgerson. As you say, they get restless. You might draft me a rough summary of Chattisworth's points. Let me know what you would suggest—precedents, historical parallels, and so on. It is true; they soon get restless."

A feeling of apathy came to him after a time, and he left his secretaries and strolled out into the Mall. A fine rain was drifting from the south, and the tops of the winter trees seemed like a band of gauze veiling the buildings of Whitehall. He went into St. James's Park, and watched the pale lights from the government buildings. Some soldiers passed him, and a policeman touched his hat.

Usually these things moved him with a strange delight. They were the instruments of power, the symbols of the world he believed in. But to-night the vision of them only filled him with an unaccountable melancholy. He suddenly remembered a day when he had strolled here with his wife twenty-five years ago.

He passed his hand across his brow and tried to brush back a certain memory; but it would not be denied. It was a gray day like this. She had made some remark, something sentimental and entirely meretricious. He remembered vividly that he had chided her at the time. One must not think like that; one must restrain and control these emotional impulses. They are retrograde, destroying. He had succeeded,

risen to the position he held, because he had always been master of himself.

After his wife's death it had been easier to do this. His two daughters had married well, one to the Bishop of St. Lubin, and the other to Viscount Chesslebeach, a venerable, but well-informed, gentleman who had been loyal to the party. His son was now in India, holding a position of considerable responsibility. He was free—free to live and struggle for his great ambitions. He was fortunate in that respect; in fact, he had always been fortunate.

He made his way back across the muddy pathway of the Mall imbued with a sudden uncontrollable desire for light and warmth.

Gales met him in the hall and relieved him of his coat. There was an undeniable sense of comfort and security about Gales. He glanced furtively at the ponderous figure of his head-man, who had been with him now longer than he could remember. He muttered something about the inclemency of the weather, and it soothed him to note the ingratiating acquiescence of the servant, as though by addressing him he had conferred a great benefit upon him. He heard the heavy breathing of Gales as he bustled away with his hat and coat, and then he warmed his hands by the fire, and strolled up-stairs to dress.

As he entered his bedroom an indefinable feeling of dreariness came over him again. It was very silent there, and the well-modulated lights above the dressing-table revealed his gleaming silver brushes and the solid properties of the mahogany bed. He looked at the fire and lighted a cigarette, a very unusual habit for him. Then he went into his dressing-room, and noted his clothes all neatly laid out for him and the brass can of hot water wrapped in the folds of a rough towel. The door, half open, revealed the silver rails and taps in the bath-room, and a very low hum of sound suggested a distant power-station or the well-oiled machinery of a lift. It was all wonderfully ordered, wonderfully coördinated.

He strolled from one room to the other

on the thick-pile carpet, trying to thrust back the waves of dejection that threatened to envelop him.

At last he threw his cigarette away, and, disrobing himself, washed and dressed.

He felt better then, a little more alert and interested. He turned down the light and went down-stairs. He felt suddenly curiously nervous and apprehensive about the dinner-party. He went into the dining-room and found Gales instructing a new butler in the subtleties of his profession. The table was laid for nine, and indeed looked worthy of Gales and of himself. There was a certain austerity and distinction about the three bowls of red tulips that were placed at intervals along it, and the old silver and the Nuremburg glasses and the cunning arrangements of concealed lights emphasized his own sure taste and discrimination. Nevertheless, he felt nervous. He fussed about the table, and took the champagne-bottles from their ice beds to satisfy himself that Gales had brought up the right year. He fidgeted with one of the type-written menu-cards, and told Gales that on a previous occasion Fouchet had overdone the chopped olives in the Hollandaise. He must speak to him. He was not sure that Fouchet was not going off. His eyesight was failing, or he was becoming careless. The straw potatoes served with the pheasant had been cut too thick, and the savories were apt to be too dry. Gales listened to these criticisms with a lugubrious sympathy, and, bowing, left the room to convey them to the chef.

After that he retired to the small Japanese room on the ground floor. When he had a bachelor party he preferred to receive his guests there. There was something about the black walls and the grotesquely carved fireplace and the heavily timbered ceiling, also carved, and painted dark red, that appealed to his sense of appropriateness in a man's dinner-party. It was essentially a man's room, a little foreboding and bizarre. It symbolized also his appreciation of a race who were above all things clever, clever and patient, industrious, esthetic, with some quality that ex-

cited the mystic tendencies of the cultivated Westerner.

He had not long to wait before two of his guests arrived, Sir Gregory Caste and Lanyon the K. C. They had met in the cloak-room, and, having previously made each other's acquaintance at an hotel at Baden-Baden, were discussing the medical values of rival Bavarian springs. It was a subject on which he himself was no mean authority. The conversation had not progressed far before Lord Bowel was shown in. He was a very big man, with a heavy dome of a head, large, pathetic eyes, and a thick, gray beard. He shook hands solemnly without any gleam of welcome, and immediately gave an account of an incurable disease from which his sister was suffering.

Tippins then arrived, a square-headed North-countryman, who did not speak all the evening except in self-defense, and he was followed by Sir Andrew Griggs and Nielson. Sir Andrew was well into the eighties, and Nielson was a thin, keen-faced man with very thick glasses. There was a considerable interval before Brodray arrived with his nephew. They were at least ten minutes late, and Brodray was very profuse with apologies.

It was curious that the young man was almost precisely as he had pictured him. He was just a red-faced boy in khaki. He fancied that Brodray introduced him as "Lieutenant Burney," but he was not sure. It was, in any case, some such name, something ordinary and insignificant.

They then all adjourned to the dining-room without breaking the general level of their conversation, and sat down.

On his right he had Lord Bowel, and on his left Sir Andrew Griggs. Brodray faced him, with Sir Gregory Caste on his right and his nephew on the left. Lanyon sat next to the lieutenant and Nielson and Tippins occupied the intervening spaces. He had thought this arrangement out with considerable care.

It was not until the sherry and caviar had fulfilled their destiny that Lord Bowel managed to complete the full description of his sister's disease. He spoke

very slowly and laboriously, and moved his beard with a curious rotary movement as he masticated his food.

Sir Andrew Griggs then managed to break into the conversation with a dissertation on the horrors of being ill in a foreign hotel. He had once been suddenly seized with a serious internal trouble and had had to undergo an operation in an hotel in Zermatt. It was very trying, and the hotel people were very unreasonable.

Brodray sang the praises of a new American osteopathist during the removal of the soup-plates, and the salmon found the director of the National Museum of Applied Arts dilating upon the virtues of grape-fruit as a breakfast food.

The host was in no hurry. He knew that the course of events would be bound to draw the conversation into channels connected with matters that were of moment to the construction of the Peasant Allotment Bill.

What more natural than that the virtues of grape-fruit should lead to the virtues of fresh air and exercise, and then obviously to horse-flesh. At the first glass of champagne the company was already in the country. Horses and dogs! Ah, how difficult to eliminate them from the conversation of a party of representative Englishmen!

Lord Bowel was the first to express his views upon the bill. The conversation led to it quite naturally at the arrival of the pheasant. They were better cooked to-night, and the potatoes were thinner, more refined.

He watched the curious movement of Lord Bowel's beard as he bit the pheasant and said in his sepulchral voice:

"The Groynes amendment will, in my opinion, inflict a grave injustice on the agricultural classes. You may remember that in Gangway's Rural Housings Bill, in eighteen-ninety-five, Lord Pennefy, who was then on the treasury bench, said—"

The ball had started. He had a curious feeling that he wished Dilgersen were there. Dilgersen had such a remarkable memory. He particularly wanted to get

Lanyon's views. Lanyon had a great reputation among the people he knew. Unfortunately, he was not a good party man. They said of him that he had a mind like a double-edged sword. He was keen, analytical, and recondite, and he did not mind whom he struck. The lawyer was intently listening to Lord Bowel. His skin was dry and cracked into a thousand little crevices, his cheek-bones stood out, and his cold, abstract eyes were gazing through his rimless pince-nez at his empty glass, for he did not drink.

Lord Bowel dwelt at great length on the bill's unfortunate attitude toward the agricultural laborer, and at even greater length on the probable result of that attitude upon the agricultural laborer at the polls. When he mentioned the party he sank his voice to a lower key, and spoke almost humanly.

The pheasants had disappeared, and little quails in aspic had quivered tremulously in the center of large plates, surrounded by a vegetable salad the secret of which he himself had discovered when living in Vienna, before Lanyon entered the arena with a cryptic utterance, quoting from an Act of James II. He spoke harshly and incisively, like a judge arraigning a criminal. It was very interesting, for the host became aware that as Lanyon proceeded he was not speaking from conviction. He had heard that Lanyon had ambitions of a certain legal position. The bill would not affect it one way or the other, but his reputation as a dialectician must be established beyond question. He had his game to play, too.

Nielson broke in, and seemed to the host to agree with Lord Bowel in an almost extravagant manner. He, too, spoke feelingly when the party was the theme. It was said that Lord Bowel was the power behind the chief. He certainly exerted a great influence in the selection of office-holders. Men whose political reputation was not made invariably agreed with Lord Bowel, in any case before his face.

The game pursued its normal course; the even tenor of the men's voices sounded

one long drone of abstract, passionless sound. Under the influence of the good wine and the solemn procession of cunningly arranged foods, they sank into a detached unity of expression. They looked at one another tolerantly, listening for signs and omens, and measuring the value of one another's remarks. There was no enthusiasm, no passion, nothing to belie the suave and cultivated accents of their voices. They seemed, perhaps, unreal to one another, merely a segregation of ideas meeting in a mirage, without prejudice or bias or any great desire for personal expression.

It was as the savory was being removed that young Burney laughed. The host did not catch what it was that made him laugh, neither did he ever know. It was probably some mildly humorous remark of Tippins. But it came crashing through the room like the reel of pipes in a desert. It was not a boisterously loud laugh, but it was loud enough to rise above the general din. It was the quality of it that seemed to rend the air like an electric thrill. It was clear, mellow, vibrant, and amazingly free. It rang out with an unrestrained vibrato of enjoyment. It hung in the air and satisfied its purpose; it seemed to lash the walls of the room and hurl its message defiantly at the ceiling. It could not be subdued, and it could never be forgotten. It was an amazing laugh. It was like the wind on the moors or the crash of great, high waves breaking on a rock, something that had been imprisoned and suddenly breaks free and rides serenely to its end.

And the saintly Cybeline—

It was curious. Why, immediately he heard the young man's laugh, did this line occur to him? Gales was standing by the sideboard looking flustered and perturbed. People did not laugh in the presence of Gales. He had a faculty of discouraging any flippant digressions from the dignity of politics or dinner. Lanyon was looking in the young man's direction, his keen eyes surveying the wine-glasses set there.

Old Sir Andrew looked at him also and smiled dimly; but, surprisingly enough, the others hardly seemed to have noticed the laugh.

Lord Bowel was saying:

"If, therefore, we are prepared to accept this crisis which the opposition, with a singular lack of insight, in my opinion, seem disposed to precipitate upon the country, we shall be—er—lacking in loyalty not only to the—er—Constitution, but to ourselves, and I said to the chief on Wednesday—"

And the saintly Cybeline—

What on earth did it mean? What was Lord Bowel talking about? Why did the young man's laugh still seem to be ringing round the room? He looked at him; the boy was talking animatedly to Brodray and grinning; he thought he caught something about "we did n't sleep under cover for a fortnight." He had not been drinking, certainly not to excess. No one had had sherry except the silent Tippins. He might have had three glasses of champagne. It certainly did n't account for the laugh; besides, it was not that sort of laugh.

There was something, something something,

And the something will entwine,

And the something, something, something

With the saintly Cybeline.

A shadowy vision glimmered past the finger-bowl in front of him. He remembered now: it was in Frodsee's room at Magdalen. There was a tall chap, with curly, dark hair sitting on Frodsee's table, swinging his legs. He was in "shorts," and his bare knees and stockings were splashed with mud. Frodsee himself was standing by the window declaiming his ridiculous jingle. And there was a third boy there who was laughing uncontrollably.

With the saintly Cybeline.

He wished he could remember the rest of the words. The sun was streaming through the window, and the young wil-

lows were whispering above the river. The jingle finished, and they all laughed, and one laugh rang out above the rest. Strange that it should all come rushing back to him at that moment—the free ring of his own laughter across the years! He had something then, he could n't think what it was—something that he had since lost.

"Even if in the end we have to sacrifice some of these minor principles, I am inclined to think, sir, that the broader issues will be better served. The interests of the party are interdependent—"

Nielson was speaking, nervously twisting the cigar in his mouth.

He made a desperate plunge to find his place in the flow of this desultory discussion. He mumbled some inchoate remark upon the land laws. It was not in any way germane to what had just been said, and he knew it; only he wanted them to draw him back among them, to protect him from the flood of perverse memories that strove to increase his melancholy.

But the memory of that laugh unnerved him. He could not concentrate. He longed once more for Dilgeron, or for some power that would give him a grip upon his concrete existence. He rose from the table, and led his guests back into the Japanese room. He lighted a cigar and, contrary to his custom, he indulged in a liqueur. His guests formed themselves into little groups, and he hovered between them, afraid to remain with either long in case they should discover his horror, that in that hour, all through a boy's laugh, he had lost the power to concentrate.

Perhaps something in his manner conveyed itself to his guests, for they broke up early, first old Griggs, then Nielson, then Brodray and the boy. He shook the boy's hand, but made no comment.

Lanyon took his departure alone, and Tippins followed. Lord Bowel seemed the only one disposed to remain. He sank back in an easy-chair and talked interminably, unaware of any psychologic change in the atmosphere of the room. He found a patient listener in Gregory Caste, to

whom the discussions of a government official were as balm.

The host moved restlessly, blinking at his two remaining guests. Sometimes he would sit furtively on the edge of a chair and listen and nod his head and say: "Yes, yes; I quite agree. Yes; that is so."

Then he would rise and walk to the fireplace and move some object an inch or two from the position in which it was placed and then move it back again. He drank a glass of lemon-water, a row of which were placed on a silver tray by the wall, and smoked another cigarette. Then the instinct of common courtesy prompted him once more to join his two remaining guests. He looked closely at Lord Bowel's heavy cheeks, and a curious feeling of disgust came over him. The voice of the board of trade official boomed on luxuriously about the arts of Eastern people, about ceramics, about the diseases of bees, the iniquity of licensing restrictions, the influence of Chaldean teaching on modern theology, on the best hotel in Paris, on the vacillating character of the principal leaders of the opposition. There seemed no end to the variety of theme, and no break in the dull monotony of voice.

It must have been well after midnight that Lord Bowel suddenly sighed heavily and rose. He took his host's hand and said gloomily:

"It has been a most delightful evening."

He watched the two men pass out into the hall, and saw Gales come ponderously forward and help them with their coats. Then he drew back and looked into the fire. He pressed his hand to his brow. He had not a headache, but he felt peculiarly exhausted, as though he had been through some great strain. In the fire he saw again the nodding heads of willows and the young clouds scudding before the wind. He started. He could not understand; he could have sworn that at that moment he again heard some one laugh. He looked round to convince himself that he was alone in the room. He shivered and stood up. He was not well. He was getting old. A time comes to all men—anyway, he had not been a failure. He

had succeeded, in fact, beyond his wildest dreams. His name was known to every one in England. His features even graced the pages of the satiric journals. He was the "safe" man of the party. One paper had nicknamed him "Trumps," the safest card in the pack. It was something to have achieved this, even if he had sacrificed things, impulses, convictions, passions, the fierce joy of expressing his primitive self. Perhaps in the process he had lost something.

Ah, God! He wished the young man had not laughed.

There was a gentle tap on the door, and Gales came in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," he murmured softly.

"It's all right. I'm going to bed."

He rose weakly from the chair and went up-stairs. Once more in the bedroom, the silence tormented him. The furniture seemed no longer his own, no longer an expression of himself, but a cold, frigid statement of dead conformity. He touched the bed, and then walked up and down. What could he do? He had no power to combat the strange terrors of remorse that flooded him. He sat there silently waiting for the mood to pass. He knew that if he struggled it *would* pass. He would be himself again. It was all so foolish, so unworthy of him. He kept saying that to himself, but underneath it all something else seemed stirring—something that went to the roots of his being and shook him violently.

He waited there a long time till the house seemed given over to the embraces of the night, then he stealthily crept down-stairs again. It was all in darkness. He turned on the light in the hall and dining-room. He wandered to his accustomed chair at the dining-table and huddled into it. He struggled to piece together the memories of days of freedom and splendor when he had sacrificed nothing, when life was an open book.

He visualized little incidents of his childhood and school-days, but they seemed trivial and without significance or humor.

Ah, God! if he could laugh!

He started suddenly at the sound of some one moving in the hall. He knew instinctively it would be Gales. He jumped up. He did not want his loyal retainer to think him a fool. It would be the most terrible thing of all to appear ridiculous to Gales. He walked round the room, nervously peering at the floor.

Gales blinked at him. He was in a dressing-gown, and he mumbled:

"I beg your pardon, sir."

He glanced at Gales, but said nothing. He continued searching the floor. Gales advanced into the room and coughed and looked at him curiously. He had never known Gales to look at him before in quite that way. He felt suddenly angry with the servant and wanted to get rid of him,

but at the same time he was self-conscious and afraid. He was aware of the level tones of Gales's voice murmuring:

"Excuse me, sir, may I help you? Have you lost anything? Can I—"

The horror came home to him with increased violence as he glanced at the puffy cheeks of the butler. He felt that he could not endure him for another moment. He almost ran to the door, calling out in a harsh voice as he did so:

"Yes, yes; I've lost something."

He brushed past the butler, his cheeks hot and dry, and his eyes blazing with an unforgiving anger. He did not turn again, but hurried away like an animal that is ashamed to be seen, and ran whimpering up-stairs to his bedroom.